CHAPTER 30

MEDIA RELATIONS: DEALING WITH THE PRESS (PAO GUIDANCE)

REFERENCES

1. Joint Publication 3-61, Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations (14 May 1997) (especially ch. 3 and app. A).
2. Dept of Def., Dir. 5122.5, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ADS(PA)),* (27 Sep 00)
3. Dept of Def., Dir. 5040.4, *Joint Combat Camera Program* (9 Sep 96)
4. Dept of Def, Instr. 5405.3, *Development of Proposed Public Affairs Guidance (PPAG)* (Apr. 1991).
5. Joint Warfighting Center, Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations, ch. 8 (June 1997).

INTRODUCTION

In May 1992, DoD and major news organizations reached agreement on guidelines that will apply to media coverage of U.S. military forces engaged in armed conflict. The rules listed below have been endorsed by DoD and most major news organizations, and will govern media coverage of future U.S. armed conflicts:

1. Open and independent reporting will be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations.

2. Press pools are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. military operations. Pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of early access to a military operation. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity (within 24 to 36 hours when possible). The arrival of early access pools will not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists already in the area.

3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for specific events, such as those at extremely remote locations or where space is limited.

4. Journalists in a combat zone will be given credentials by the U.S. military and will be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect U.S. forces and their operations. Violation of the ground rules can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion of the journalist involved from the combat zone. News organizations will make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with U.S. military operations.

5. Journalists will be provided access to all major military units. Special operations restrictions may limit access in some cases.

6. Military public affairs officers should act as liaisons but should not interfere with the reporting process.

7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders should be instructed to permit journalists to ride on military vehicles and aircraft whenever feasible. The military will be responsible for the transportation of pools.

8. Consistent with its capabilities, the military will supply PAOs with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and will make these facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage. In cases when government facilities are unavailable, journalists will, as always, file by any other means available. The military will not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.

9. These principles will apply as well to the operations of the standing Department of Defense National Media Pool system.

Judge Advocates providing advice on media restrictions should read *Nation Magazine v. U.S. Department of Defense*, 762 F. Supp. 1558 (S.D.N.Y. 1991).

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE (PAO) GUIDANCE

Following is a guide for those times when you, or someone you advise, must or should talk with the press. You must always work through the PAO, as well as notify, and get approval from, your boss before talking to the press.[1] Once approval has been granted, use the pointers below in talking to the media.

Why Talk To The Media?

Organizations work a long time to achieve a reputation for a reliable product, a good service, and stability. It does this by delivering the same over and over again. That reputation is a fragile commodity for it can be destroyed by a single mishap. One bad news item is remembered forever, while 100 good news items seem to be forgotten.

Though it may seem unfair at times, our society cherishes the freedom of the press that encourages "headline news." That is, the press will print whatever news it can find by deadline, and if an edge can be put on the information to create a stir, all the better. This "selling" of the news—as opposed to "reporting" the news—results in biased articles. If only one side of a story is available, that is what is printed. The "No comment" gambit will not sit well with the viewing public (though it may be appropriate in limited cases).

Management training stresses positive action as the best way out of a dilemma, and the media is your primary channel to the American people. As a leader in the military, you are responsible for the management of Defense dollars and, more importantly, of American youth. Americans pay for the military and send their sons and daughters to fill its ranks. They "own" the military and are entitled to know the "how" and "why" it operates.

Men and women of the media are competent professionals as dedicated to their profession as you are to yours. They oftentimes have no prior military association; however, they will usually work hard to gather the facts and present an accurate story. Treat them with the respect you expect and never underrate their capability to gather information. They can be tenacious and may have sources of information not available to you.

Your command or agency has an important story to tell to the American people who support your activities. Your soldiers and employees and their activities are "news" to both local and national audiences. You are the most believable spokesman to represent them. Preparation and practice on your part will result in newsworthy, informative articles and programs that may be seen by millions of viewers and readers.

Preparing to Meet the Media

What you do before you meet the media is as important as what you do when you meet them. Often, it is the preparatory activities that will determine the success or failure of your media interview. By being prepared, you will not only be more confident and comfortable, but you will also be able to get your story across to the audience.

Some preparatory suggestions:

- Find out who the reporter is.

[1] TJAG Policy Memo 91-2 to SJAs states, "Generally, no member of your office should, without your approval, prepare a written statement for publication or permit himself or herself to be quoted by the media on official matters within the purview of your office. Similarly, unless first cleared through the Executive, neither you nor any member of your office should be interviewed by, or provide statements to, representatives of the media on issues or subjects having Army-wide, national or international implications."

- Find out why you were asked for the interview.

- Establish ground rules on what will be covered.

- Set how much time will be allowed for the interview.

- Anticipate questions and think through your responses.

- Do your homework. (Make certain you are familiar with the facts supporting your position and that they're up-to-date. Even if you're the expert, a quick brush-up will help.

- Know the key points you want to make. (You might want to type them up on a card and put the card in a prominent place on your desk. Before the interview, review them often. Are they honest, meaningful and to the point?)

- Don't memorize a statement! (You'll look stilted/pompous).

- Question your own position. Have your PAO or other staff experts play devil's advocate. If possible, practice your responses before a television camera and view the play back with members of your staff to conduct a critique. Do not be thin skinned—it is better to correct errors before friends than commit them before 1.5 million viewers.

- Read the morning paper and listen to the radio/TV before your interview in case a late-breaking news story affects your command.

The "Five and Five" Rule

The Five and Five Rule is "Know the five best and worst things about your agency—and be able to discuss them in detail any time." Stay current—have your staff keep you up-to-date. Practice answering a question about a bad news subject and transition to a good news subject.

Specific suggestions if you're going on the air:

- Know the format and theme of the show. Know who will be in the audience—do they let reporters sit in the audience and ask questions? Who is the viewer audience? It may be helpful to watch the show several times.

- Arrive early to check the setting and your appearance.

- When you arrive, talk to the hosts or questioners. Offer subjects or points you'd like to discuss. Ask them what they'll be covering.

You're on!

This is your chance to tell your story accurately and forcefully. Many people are intimidated by all the blinding lights and the ominous, expressionless, one-eyed cameras staring directly at them. There's no need for anxiety. Think of the cameras and the microphones as your friends, and imagine that you are visiting friends in their living room because that's where you will be seen or heard—on the television set in someone's living room or on a car radio. If you've prepared well, all you will have to do is take advantage of a few techniques that will help you come across to the audience in a forceful yet friendly way.

First, your appearance:

- Check your appearance. (Be vain. Have yourself inspected. Remember, you're representing the entire military.)

- Ask for makeup to help control perspiration and to avoid glare from the lights. (If you have a heavy beard, shave before you go).

- Don't wear sunglasses outdoors, or tinted glasses indoors.

- If seated, keep your jacket buttoned. To remove wrinkles in the front, pull the jacket down in the rear.

If you're in civilian clothes:

- Men should wear medium-tone gray, blue or brown suits. Women should wear solid, medium-color dresses. Avoid very light or very dark dresses (conservative street-length dresses or pantsuits are preferred). Never wear bold prints or patterns.

- Wear light-color shirts. However, avoid whites, since it is difficult for the technical crew to adjust contrasts.

- Avoid bow ties. They have a tendency to bob when you are talking.

- Wear over-the-calf socks. (That way, if you cross your legs, your shins won't outshine your shoes.)

- Keep jewelry simple. (That sparkling ring may look terrific at a dinner party, but on television it's going to detract). Military brass may be coated with soap to prevent glare.

Second, your action. (Or, what do I do with my hands?):

- In stand-up interviews, stand straight. (Don't lean into the microphone and don't rock back and forth). You may want to place one foot slightly forward of the other. This will help you keep from rocking or shifting back and forth.

- Hands should be relaxed at your side at the beginning of the interview. However, if you are comfortable, use them when talking. Effective use of hands is natural and provides action and emphasis.

- When seated, sit with the base of the spine back on the chair and lean slightly forward. Place your hands well forward on the arms of the chair or your knees. Don't put them in your lap.

- Warmth, friendliness and sincerity are important to the interview. Key tools are smiles, gestures and pauses, at appropriate times. But don't smile at serious matters or out of discomfort. Remember to keep an open face.

- Don't adopt the questioner's attitude, even on hostile questions. (Remember, the viewer/listener at home may be on your side.)

- Don't distract your home audience. (Don't pull up your socks, fiddle with your ring, or look at your watch hoping you've almost finished).

- Concentrate on the interviewer, and listen! (Avoid looking around the room: It will give you the "darting eye" look of a sinister villain). Look the interviewer in the face and use her/his name if possible.

- Keep your head up so you won't look guilty. It lets the light onto your face and prevents deep shadows around the eyes. (This is especially important if you wear military glasses: If the audience can't see your eyes, they may not trust you!)

- Keep your hands off the mike. Ignore the mike and volume—that's what the sound technician is paid to do.

- If you have a real physical reason for preferring one profile or side (e.g. a hearing problem), make this known to the program staff.

- If possible, don't sit between two questioners. (It's not an inquisition, and your shifting head will make you feel and look guilty.)

- Be yourself! Concentrate on how to get ideas across—not just words.

Third, how do I say what I want to say?

- Welcome the reporter and the questions. Take the attitude that the reporter is your conduit to your audience and they are interested in what you have to say.

- Be relaxed, confident; you are the expert.

- Avoid jargon, acronyms and technical terms.

- Phrase your responses with the public in mind rather than bringing out how the military benefited from a decision or action.

- Phrase your answers in terms and experiences your audience will relate to. Talk as though you were talking to your mother or father.

- Minimize the use of "we"; whenever possible, use "I."

- Keep your answers short! Give your "headline" first and then support your answers. Make the interviewer keep the conversation going, but don't just give a "yes" or "no." If you have answered the question, stop talking. Just because the reporter leaves the mike up doesn't mean you have to talk—that's what he gets paid to do. Otherwise, you may talk through your answer and wander into dangerous ground.

- Above all, be positive in your answers!

- Use pitch and rate changes for variety.

- Build in a "cut-off" with your answer if you wish to drop the topic.

- Don't be curt (even in response to the dumbest question).

- Don't restate the question in total or begin with gratuitous remarks such as, "I'm glad you asked that." Sometimes, however, you may wish to partially restate the question just to clarify what you are answering. Also you may restate the question if the audience does not hear the question.

- Pause before you speak. Take a second or two to think about your answer. Not only do rapid responses appear rehearsed, but many officials wish they had thought about an answer before answering. In electronic journalism, the pauses will be edited out and print reporters don't care.

- Answer only one question at a time. (If there are multiple questions, answer the one you want to answer and then ask what the other questions were).

- Use your key points when you have a chance. You can use one question as a springboard to your points by building on your answer. Remember the Five and Five rule.

- If you're not sure of the facts, say so in you response and promise to get them. (Then be sure to follow up).

- If you don't know the answer or can't discuss it for any reason, say so. If it's classified, don't get into a verbal fencing match; say it's classified. Never give a "no comment" response.

- Discuss only those activities and policies within the purview of your command or area of responsibility. Don't discuss hypothetical situations. Don't speculate.

- Don't be defensive-take the opportunity and use it to your benefit.

- Don't repeat a reporter's terminology or accept his "facts and figures" as truth unless you know they're accurate. Don't let reporters put words in your mouth or ideas in the minds of the audience.

- If it's a pretaped or print interview, be careful of "off-the-record" comments. Anything you say may be used—and probably will be. Never go off the record with a reporter you don't know.

- Always assume the tape is rolling and the microphone is on! (Even during breaks, commercials, etc.).

- If you're confronted with a news conference or a multitude of reporters on a noisy street, don't shout. Television is an intimate medium and, although you may reach millions of people, you are really talking to groups of two to three in their living rooms.

- Never lie to a reporter. Not only could you get yourself in trouble, you may lessen the credibility of the whole Army.

- Have your PAO sit in on the interview and, if possible, tape it. This is a technique which news media representatives consider professional and which serves a very useful purpose: It provides an accurate record and protects you from being quoted out of context.

After It's All Over

- Don't demand to see the show or article in advance publication. You can ask, but they aren't under any obligation. If you demand, they may not give it to you and you may hurt your credibility and the chances of a favorable piece.

- Provide anything you promised you'd get back to them with.

- Be available for follow-up. Reporters often will have points they may want clarified or need additional information on.

- Have your staff available for corroboration and follow-up.

- Clarify any points you think may have been misunderstood, and provide additional information you think may be needed.

- Actively seek other opportunities to tell the military's story.

A Media Survival Guide

Rear Admiral Brent Baker, the Navy's Chief of Information, offers nine recommendations for getting information out to the media accurately and without compromising security:

1. Generally, it is in the institution's best interest to deal honestly and in a timely manner with the media. If you do not play, you surrender to your critics who will be eagerly at hand.

2. Understand the media's obsession with speed, and through daily contact, keep working to win the battle of the first media perception.

3. Leaders must learn to take time to articulate their positions to the media. They must use short, simple language that the media will use and the public will understand.

4. Use the media to inform the public proactively, not just to react to critics.

5. Understand that the news is almost always skewed towards the side of those willing to talk to the media, and against those who say, "No comment."

6. Remember that CNN will correct the television record, while other networks rarely will do that because of time constraints.

7. Realize that there are reporters who do want to be accurate and have balanced stories. Too often editors or television producers get in the way and interject the political or budget spin on an otherwise positive story about our people. Getting reporters out to the fleet, field, or factory floor is a beginning.

8. Play the media game. Understand there are times for a low profile, but more often, a media opportunity to tell your story should not be lost because of fear. We need to tell people, through the media, what we are about.

9. Don't be thin-skinned. We will not win every media engagement, but we must continue to communicate to our own people and to the public.

Summary

The best and easiest way to be relaxed when talking to the media or to a group of people is to do so, often. Generals who have spent their lives talking before hundreds and thousands of troops often clam up when confronted by the "camera, lights, action" of television or by a hostile group of reporters. There's no need to be defensive. They are our conduits to the American public.

Your PAO can give you the best advice before, during and after an interview. As soon as you've been asked for an interview, bring your PAO into the action. PAOs know the media and the news business and can give you sound advice on what you should and should not do. If you go into the interview or speaking engagement with a positive attitude, and really care about your points, you'll do fine. Remember, we're talking about our organization and our soldiers and we have a terrific story to tell. Let's tell it.

As a quick recap, remember these points:

- Prepare—don't "wing it."

- Conversational—treat the mike and the interviewer as friends.

- Concentrate—forget yourself and concentrate on the questions and on your key ideas.

- Control—know the key points you want to make, and answer questions on your own terms, in your own way. Use the "five and five" rule.

- Confidence—you're the expert and you know what you're doing.

- Comfortable—relax and enjoy it. Forget about your hands and the mike and camera, and be natural.

- Concise—get your points across directly, quickly, and in language the audience will understand.

- Care-care about the Army, the audience, the interview, and your subject. If you don't, neither will anyone else.

- Relax. Be Honest. Be Sincere.

- Keep an open face.

APPENDIX

JOINT PUB 3-61, (May 1997)
GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MEDIA

1. Preparation results in effective discussions with the news media. Central to the process is the effort to identify what information will be released based on prevailing public affairs guidance and operations security. Commanders, briefers, and public affairs personnel should be aware of the basic facts of any operation and sensitive to the various consequences of communicating them to the public.

2. "Security at the source" serves as the basis for ensuring that no information is released which jeopardizes operations security or the safety and privacy of joint military forces. Under this concept, individuals meeting with journalists are responsible for ensuring that no classified or sensitive information is revealed. This guidance also applies to photographers, who should be directed not to take pictures of classified areas or equipment or in any way to compromise sensitive information.

3. Each operational situation will require a deliberate public affairs assessment in order to identify specific information to be released. The following categories of information are usually releasable, though individual situations may require modifications:

a. The arrival of U.S. units in the commander's area of responsibility once officially announced by the Department of Defense or by other commands in accordance with release authority granted by the Office of the ASD(PA). Information could include mode of travel, sea or air, date of departure and home station or port.

b. Approximate friendly force strength and equipment figures.

c. Approximate friendly casualty and prisoner of war figures by Service. Approximate figures of enemy personnel detained during each action or operation.

d. Non-sensitive, unclassified information regarding U.S. air, ground, sea, space, and special operations, past and present.

e. In general terms, identification and location of military targets and objectives previously attacked and the types of ordnance expended.

f. Date, time, or location of previous conventional military missions and actions as well as mission results.

g. Number of combat air patrol or reconnaissance missions and/or sorties flown in the operational area. Generic description of origin of air operations, such as "land" or "carrier-based."

h. Weather and climate conditions.

i. If appropriate, allied participation by type (ground units, ships, and aircraft).

j. Conventional operations' unclassified code-names.

k. Names and hometowns of U.S. military personnel.

l. Names of installations and assigned units.

m. Size of friendly force participating in an action or operation using general terms such as "multi-battalion," or "naval task force."

n. Types of forces involved (e.g., aircraft, ships, carrier battle groups, tank and infantry units).

4. Classified aspects of equipment, procedures, and operations must be protected from disclosure to the media. In more general terms, information in the following categories of information should not be revealed because of potential jeopardy to future operations, the risk to human life, possible violation of host nation and/or allied sensitivities, or the possible disclosure of intelligence methods and sources. While these guidelines serve to guide military personnel who talk with the media, they may also be used as ground rules for media coverage. The list is not necessarily complete and should be adapted to each operational situation.

a. For U.S. (or allied) units, specific numerical information on troop strength, aircraft, weapons systems, on-hand equipment, or supplies available for support of combat units. General terms should be used to describe units, equipment and/or supplies.

b. Any information that reveals details of future plans, operations, or strikes, including postponed or canceled operations.

c. Information and imagery that would reveal the specific location of military forces or show the level of security at military installations or encampments. For date lines, stories will state that the report originates from general regions unless a specific country has acknowledged its participation.

d. Rules of engagement.

e. Information on intelligence activities, including sources and methods, lists of targets and battle damage assessments.

f. During an operation, specific information on friendly force troop movement or size, tactical deployments, and dispositions that would jeopardize operations security or lives. This would include unit designations and names of operations until released by the JFC.

g. Identification of mission aircraft points of origin, other than as land or carrier-based.

h. Information on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of weapon systems and tactics (to include, but not limited to enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection, or security measures).

i. Specific identifying information on missing or downed aircraft or ships while search and rescue operations are planned or underway.

j. Special operations forces' unique methods, equipment, or tactics which, if disclosed, would cause serious harm to the ability of these forces to accomplish their mission.

k. Information on operational or support vulnerabilities that could be used against U.S. or allied units until that information no longer provides tactical advantage to the enemy and is therefore released by the joint commander. Damage and casualties may be described as "light," "moderate," or "heavy."

l. Specific operating methods and tactics (e.g., offensive and defensive tactics or speed and formations). General terms such as "low" or "fast" may be used.